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ABSTRACT

A review of literature concerning the effectiveness of bilingual education programs consists of three sections, each containing descriptions of one or more studies and evaluations of the studies' significance. The first examines broad studies of the factors promoting or affecting bilingual education program success. The second section looks at research concerning attitudes toward bilingual education. The third section focuses on the need for program evaluation. Implications are drawn as follows: (1) a more uniform definition of bilingual education is needed; and (2) more evaluative research on bilingual education programs and their impacts is needed. (MSE)

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A Review of the Effectiveness of Bilingual Programs with Limited-English-Speaking Children

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Introduction

A controversy regarding bilingual programs and their structure or approach currently exists. Different philosophies argue about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of various bilingual programs. It is presently unclear as to how the philosophies dictate program format and how useful they are.

Statement of the Problem

Are bilingual programs effective in promoting the growth or development of language with limited-English-speaking children, that is, children who speak a foreign language effortlessly but cannot speak English with such ease? In other words, do bilingual programs which teach students in English and one other language lead to fluency in English as a second language? Do opportunities exist in the classroom for limited-English-speaking children to improve their written and spoken English?

Rationale

A few studies illustrate characteristics, such as structure, techniques and outcomes, that improve English skills. More often, however, studies illustrate the need to look at what works in bilingual programs and what needs to change. Are the characteristics of bilingual programs presently being examined?

Review of the Literature

The following literature review addresses bilingual programming or issues related to it. The first section focuses on bilingual education and evaluation. The second section examines attitudes toward bilingual education. The last section addresses the need for program evaluation.

Bilingual Education

In a review of the literature by Rodriguez (1984) selected findings which have influenced bilingual education were examined: language, teacher effectivenss, and ethnographies. Rodriguez found in her review that competent teachers (a) communicate clearly, (b) monitor student progress, (c) provide immediate feedback, (d) allow enough time for learning and use time efficiently, (e) use active teaching strategies, (f) are fast paced, and (g) are challenging.

On language research Rodriguez found that students demonstrate high levels of proficiency academically when they have developed proficiency in their native language and in English. It was also found that common, everyday use of language is learned through formal instruction.

Regarding ethnographies, it was found that school is the forum for transmitting social culture. In other words, a classroom is influenced by the socio-cultural variables children bring to it.

Though Rodriguez focused on three relevant areas of bilingual education in her extensive literature review, there is one area of the review which poses doubt. Some of her reports on studies conducted do not include information about the sample groups (number, race, age-range, socio-economic background). For this reason, the reader must be aware that the results may be misleading, or may be generalizing to a population that is not the same. Nevertheless, the literature review was clearly written and the researcher's terms were thoroughly explained.

Waggoner (1984) examined the definitions of language-minority

children at risk, and the criteria for admission into bilingual programs. There is a need to make two clear definitions of language-minority children at risk: those children with limited-English- speaking ability coming from non-English backgrounds and those children with limited-English-speaking ability coming from English speaking backgrounds. Waggoner stated that, by making clear definitions of the children who need assistance in school programs, one can then make appropriate placements for them, such as bilingual or remedial classes.

Waggoner further examined which children are at risk by referring to census data. Five million school age children claim a language other than English as their mother tongue. This statistic and others illustrated the need to examine bilingual education programs. She concluded that many factors can play a role in determining which children need bilingual education (for example, language the parents speak, the mother tongue of the children, and the socio-economic status of the family), but ultimately, these characteristics should not restrict the definition of language-minority children at risk. Some children might need the services but will not qualify because of limitations in the definition.

Waggoner used a statistical reporting approach to support her view on children at risk in bilingual programs. It was a thorough approach capable of highlighting important information that has not been previously examined. However, at times, the statistics were difficult to understand because they were not explained clearly.

A bilingual preschool project aimed at identifying factors

that might lead to greater academic achievement gains and language development was conducted by Arocena and Curtis (1984). Eighty-five four-year-olds from five elementary neighborhood schools in Austin, Texas classified with limited-English-proficiency participated. A pre-test, post-test design was used. The children were divided into six classes. Results of two classses (class A, n=12, and class B, n=11) were reported to illustrate the findings of the pre- and post-tests using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised (PPVT-R). It was never made clear how these two classes were selected to represent the study's findings. However, the results of the PPVT-R indicated that class A had improved and class B had not. Various factors were examined to explore reasons why class A scored higher that class B, based on the results of the one test. It is important to remember that the size of the sample for the second part of this study is very small (n=23).

Structured classroom observations and teacher interviews were used to assess program effectiveness. Recommendations from the second part of the study were: (a) increase the time dedicated to formal and informal learning (presentation of new knowledge and knowledge already learned),; (b) reduce the time students spend working in independent learning centers; (c) use two languages for instruction with English as the predominant language of the class; (d) use a variety of instructional materials adequate to the language level of the students, including high level thinking materials; (e) rotate students to new groups for instruction when the language level of the students changes;(f) conduct the entire instructional period

in one language and then translate briefly to students who do not understand; and (g) set language development as the main goal for the school year.

There was a limited sample group in this study. Though it is clear that four-year-olds would most likely be the common age for a preschool project, other areas of representation are not stated, such as race and socio-economic status of the parents. The sample was also limited in that the children were not representative of different areas of Austin or of Texas, which makes the findings harder to generalize. Despite these flaws, the study provided clear descriptions of the project, its findings, and recommendations for designing bilingual programs.

Attitudes Toward Bilingual Education

In a survey conducted by Huddy, Cardoza and Sears (1984) public attitudes toward bilingual education were examined. One-thousand one-hundred seventy non-hispanic people were surveyed using a questionnaire designed by the authors to collect information on attitudes toward bilingual education in the United States.

Results indicated that the public tends to be favorably disposed toward bilingual education. However, bilingual education did not conjure up the same meaning for all the respondents. Additionally, it was found that current public support favors programs that teach language-minority students to speak English.

Information from the study must be reviewed in light of its limitations. It was stated that a research firm conducted the national sampling, but no descriptions of the sampling group was given (for example, age, race, geographic area or socio-economic

status). Another limitation of tne study involves the wav in which the results were reported. The authors report descriptive findings from the information collected, using the questionnaire. They allude to use of the inferential procedures,analysis of variance (ANOVA). However, no further discussion or visual display of results was provided.

Parental attitudes toward bilingual education were investigated in a survey conducted by Torres (1984). One-hundred forty-nine parents with children in Spanish-English bilingual education classes from fourteen elementary schools in San Jose, California participated. The principals from each school also participated in the study.Forty-one parents were active members in the Bilingual School Advisory Committee (BSAC) and one-hundred eight parents were not. A personal interview developed by the authors was used to elicit information on the attitudes and behaviors of parents with children in bilingual classes.

Among the three groups, BSAC members, non-BSAC members, and principals, agreement was found for children to learn Spanish in school for its economic value and for social reasons. Agreement was also found among the three groups for learning English. Other results revealed that parents with children in the bilingual education program hold positive attitudes toward bilingual education and that attitudes toward bilingual education were not strongly associated with BSAC participation.

Torres's article presented a complete literature review on parent attitudes. However, little information was given about the sample group in her study. What information was presented can lead the reader to believe the author used a limited sample

(parents and principals from fourteen San Jose, California schools). The article also lacked a copy of the author-made interview, as well as tables or statistical analyses on the data found.The results of the study were limited in utility because of these omissions.

Need for Evaluation

Gonzales (1984) argued in favor of an effective and concise evaluation of special education programs serving bilingual or limited-English-proficient (LEP) students. One out of eight people in the United States has a non-English background. Therefore, he stressed the importance of collecting and analyzing statistical data since statistics have become a driving force in school and educational policy making.

Based on Gonzales's review of the literature, he declared certain areas of bilingual or LEP programs in need of immediate attention. These areas included: (a) assessment and placement into a program; and, (b) program evaluation, specifically teacher training and curriculum. He concluded that bilingual and LEP programs need to be evaluated for successes and failures so that exemplary programs can be found and dispersed.

Gonzales's review of the literature made great use of descriptive statistics and the history of P.L. 94-142. He focused on relevant issues regarding bilingual education, such as politics and the need for evaluation. In all, this article was clearly written and well-supported by data.

Summary

Bilingual education, attitudes toward bilingual education, and the need for evaluation of bilingual programs have been

reviewed. Included in the bilingual education review were discussions on teacher effectiveness, the role of language, ethnographic perspectives, children at risk, and program effectiveness. The surveys toward bilingual education included data on public and parent attitudes. A need for evaluation of bilingual education programs and LEP programs has been addressed.

Implications

Various definitions of bilingual education exist. It appears that this lack of uniformity has posed problems in identifying children that qualify for bilingual education, and perhaps this has led to inappropriate placements. To avoid the possibility of inappropriate placements there should be a clear definition. It should be broad enough to encompass the wide variety of children that may need it, yet be limited enough so that bilingual education does not become a catch-all.

There is a need for evaluation of bilingual education programs. At present, there is a lack of information reporting the success of bilingual education programs, teachers, and students. More information exists on the statistical data collectd on the number of children who cannot speak English fluently. This should alert educators that bilingual education is and will be a very important issue.

This review of the literature is limited in scope - that is, much more information on bilingual education is available. However, based on the articles presented, it is not clear if limited-English-speaking (LES) children do grow to develop English fluency. This type of information is necessary so

that LES children can benefit from the best possible placements. Evaluation of bilingual education programs needs to take place so that unsatisfactory programs may improve and LES children may be given the same opportunities to learn to speak and write English effectively.

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